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Capitol Hill Republicans are invoking former President Ronald Reagan in their latest effort to strengthen their party's conservative credentials, forming a new caucus whose members must pledge to support limited government and to restore ethics in Washington.

"We don't want to go back to what Reagan did," said Sen. Jim DeMint, South Carolina Republican. "We want to take those principles he stood for and go forward, applying them to the challenges of today."

Unlike most party groups, the Reagan21 caucus was formed by lawmakers themselves during months of private meetings over dinners and breakfasts, and without the assistance of congressional staff.

"As a party, we've been strong on social issues," said Rep. Paul D. Ryan, Wisconsin Republican. "But on spending issues, we've dropped the ball."

The group also is somewhat exclusive. Any member of the House and Senate is technically allowed to join the group, but, unlike similar fiscally conservative caucuses like the Republican Study Committee (RSC), lawmakers' memberships can be revoked if they are not actively promoting the group's agenda.

"If you don't keep the commitments, you won't be a part of it," Mr. DeMint said.

"This is a group that can't be bought off," added Rep. John Campbell, California

Republican.

However, House Majority Leader Steny H. Hoyer said Republicans talk about fiscal restraint but don't have the record to back it up.

"While Republicans claim to support fiscal responsibility, their actions tell a completely different story," the Maryland Democrat said. "While Reagan increased the debt by \$1.7 trillion in eight years, the 21st-century Reaganites have doubled that amount in just six years, adding \$3.4 trillion to the debt."

The office of Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, Nevada Democrat, declined to comment.

Along with Mr. DeMint, Reagan21 was formed by a small group of similarly-minded fiscal and social conservatives. Sen. Tom Coburn of Oklahoma is the Senate's other leading member, while the House membership includes Rep. Jeb Hensarling of Texas, the RSC chairman; John Shadegg of Arizona; Mr. Campbell; Tom Price of Georgia; and Mr. Ryan.

"Americans are disgusted by a Congress that is self-dealing and corrupt — that spends too much and under the control of the new majority is moving dramatically to the left," Mr. Shadegg said.

House Minority Leader John A. Boehner praised Reagan21.

"As I've often said, our party is not in need of new principles; our principles have stood the test of time, and they will endure long after the torch has been passed from today's leaders to the

next," the Ohio Republican said. "But congressional Republicans are using our time in the minority as an opportunity to renew our commitment to our principles."

Although Mr. Boehner supports the group, as party leader he does not formally join interparty caucuses.

Members of the caucus said they hope to influence fellow lawmakers and voters through their actions, rather than rhetoric. "Most of what we do and say up here doesn't make sense to people," Mr. DeMint said.

Several members of the Reagan21 caucus attended their group's first event earlier this week — an anti-earmark pledge taken with the support of such anti-tax organizations as Citizens Against Government Waste.

Some polls have shown that earmarks, special funding requests attached to larger spending bills, do not resonate as a leading issue with voters.

But Mr. Hensarling and other Reagan21 members said that when they travel across the country, earmarks and other concerns about pork-barrel spending are top concerns among their constituents.

"I don't concede that," Mr. Hensarling said of poll results. "We spend more on earmarks than on our entire veterans health care system."